

Message from President Cook

August 31, 2023

Well, hello everybody it's week two at NDSU and I think everything is off to a fantastic start. I am here with Dr. Warren Christensen. Warren, tell us about yourself. Well, I'm a professor of physics here at NDSU. Also, happen to be serving as the Faculty Senate President. I'm originally from Nebraska but I've been here for 14 years so I'm pretty much a Bison now. Fourteen years. So, why physics? Well, I was one of those weird kids who actually enjoyed doing word problems when I was growing up. Everyone else seemed to not like them and then physics is just more and more word problems. I just always enjoyed that application of mathematics into problems that meant something. Very cool. So now, Warren has an awesome reputation of being a great faculty member, a great teacher, a great educator. How many students are you teaching this fall? I'm teaching 44 students in a calculus-based physics course. Calculus. So, if anybody wants to come and sit in on a calculus-based physics course Warren's the guy to do it with. So. It'd be great. Yeah.

So, we're here to talk about a program called Learning Assistants. It's been active here for quite a while. Warren's been involved from the very beginning. Tell everybody what the Learning Assistant Program is. I'd be happy to do so. The Learning Assistants Program is something that started here in 2012. It was housed originally in the College of Science and Mathematics and has been supported by a series of deans starting with Kevin McCall, Scott Wood, and now Kimberly Wallin. So, it is a program that recruits upper-division undergraduate students and it brings them into large lecture introductory courses and helps facilitate more interactive engagement opportunities for both the faculty and for students. It also helps increase sense of belonging, it helps increase retention rates. It's just fabulous all around. Yeah, it's a great program. So, let me just get this straight. So, we're talking about students that are here that have been successful in these classes.

They're a little bit older, they're coming in helping our new students coming in and they're really, you know, they're not only helping to mentor those students but they're probably learning all kinds of mentoring and leadership skills as well. Yes, absolutely true. I mean, as much as I'd like to think that I'm young and hip, right. These undergraduate students from the upper division are much closer in age to these undergraduate students in the courses and we know that makes a significant difference about their comfortableness approaching (that works) their comfort approaching students that are a little more their age. We're coming into a professor's office might be a little bit intimidating and we know that that's a helpful strategy. I absolutely love it. So, you've been doing this for a long time.

Yes, sir. All right so, you've interacted with a lot of these students, you've seen this work in the classroom. Do you have a special memory or experience or student or anything that comes to mind that you know you just you knew you were knocking it out of the park? Yeah so, I've had a lot of wonderful Learning Assistants. I'm gonna, the one that kind of stands out to me right now is that there was a student named Daron Dykes who is in a classroom of mine, probably about six or seven years ago. And there was a project that someone was working on and they happened to ask Daron, like who like...do you think that Warren is like really, do you think that faculty in the LA program are listening to students, their student LA's and trying to get feedback and Daron's response was I can't believe that anyone would ever say that Warren doesn't listen to his LA's. So, he just felt so a part of the course, he felt so integrated, he was helping do all sorts of different tasks and it meant the world to me.

Yeah, and that's the classic right we as educators and leaders, we're getting as much from our students as I think they're getting from us and that's what makes it so special. So, we've been doing this for a number of years, we're doing it this fall. Right. Next spring we're kind of blowing it up a little bit and doing a little bit more across campus. Any comments on that?

Yeah so, originally like I said it started in the College of Science and Math and now we're going to expand it across the University campus. Trying to look at courses where students might be struggling a little bit and kind of giving some resources and helping them out so they can be more successful. It also benefits faculty who can now teach in ways that were kind of a little bit more difficult to do when there's one instructor and 150 students, it's hard to go around and check to make sure everyone's doing the assignment correctly. But now, you have Learning Assistants to help bridge that gap. Yeah, I love it. So, there's a lot of different stakeholders and audiences. You know, current students, you know, you're going to have classes where you're gonna have Learning Assistants and they're helping you out. Maybe faculty who haven't been involved with it might have a chance to do that moving forward. If you're a mom or a dad or an alumni we want you to know that this is what we're doing to make NDSU in the first year super special for incoming freshmen and, frankly, if you're an incoming student this is the kind of learning environment that we have for you. So, we're super pumped about it. Absolutely. Love Warren's leadership on this. Thank you. All right. Absolutely.

So now I'm going to pull Warren into the Kudos part of this. Let's do it. It's always fun because we have people working hard that deserve a little kudos. So, Kendra Greenlee, kudos to you. You received a 4-million-dollar grant from the U.S. Army called "Effects of pollinator plantings and nutrition on pollinators across ecological, organismal, and molecular levels" Co-PI by Julia Bowsher. So, congratulations. Yes.

Also, congratulations to one of my close colleagues Jennifer Momsen who received a 1.2-million-dollar grant from the National Science Foundation entitled The CiDER Program: Collaborations in Discipline-Based Education Research or DBER to train the next generation of DBER scholars. Co-PIs on that Grant include John Buncher, Mila Kryjevskaia, Katie Wissman, and James Nyachwaya. And, I heard a rumor you're involved with this grant. Yes, to a lesser degree but yeah, I'm senior personnel. I'm going to be contributing to some of the mentoring of these postdocs as well.

We're really excited. So, you're mentoring on grants, you're mentoring on the Learning Assistant Program. This is what our faculty do. Totally love it so, thank you. Absolutely.

Some fun facts that just came out that we just learned about. So, our acceptance rates across our majors. To medical school, we're at 54.5 percent. So, if you look at national averages it's about 44 percent so we're beating the national average by quite a bit. Very cool. So, kudos to everybody who's playing an important part in, you know, really educating our students, mentoring them, and preparing them for medical school. So, that's not something everybody thinks about that we do at NDSU and we do it we do it better than the national average so kudos to everybody.

So, last one sir. All right final kudos go out to Dr. Heidi Pecoraro who has been awarded the Veterinarian of the Year by the North Dakota Veterinary Medical Association for her dedication to the laboratory, advocacy for her staff, passion for animal disease diagnostics, humility, compassion for clients, volunteer efforts as part of the National Animal Health Laboratory Network and Veterinary Reserve Corps. Which is also pretty amazing. So, kudos to her. Absolutely.

Thank you, Warren for joining me. We really appreciate it. My pleasure. Hope everybody's having a great second week of classes, we're off to a great start. It's been a lot of fun so far. So, if we see you around, we'll definitely say thank you and I'm a little jealous Warren definitely has the voice for this much better than I do, so I'll have to think about my next guest.

But, all of that aside we got to say it, right? Yep. Go Bison!